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Hundreds of families crowd Stanislaus education office to protest student vaccine mandate

BY EMILY ISAACMAN

UPDATED OCTOBER 07, 2021 11:42 AM

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Modesto-area children, parents demonstrate outside County Office of Education after Gov. Gavin Newsom requires students get vaccinated pending FDA approval. BY EMILY ISAACMAN

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Hundreds of families crowded sidewalks outside the Stanislaus County Office of Education on Wednesday morning to protest Gov. Gavin Newsom's announcement that eligible students must get vaccinated for COVID-19 pending full approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

The county education office has no control over the statewide mandate, which on Friday became the first such requirement in the country and applies to public and private schools.

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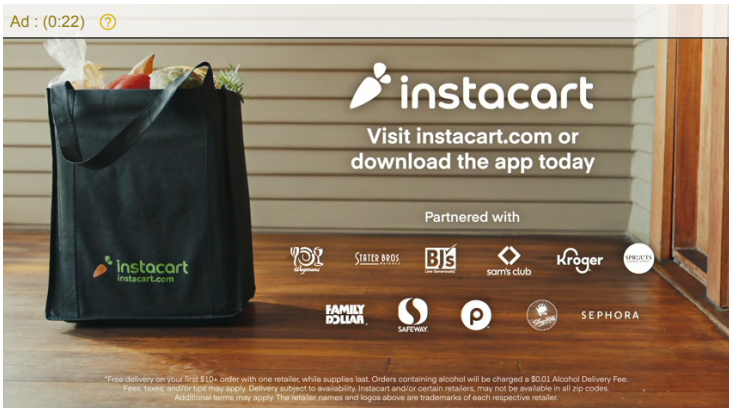

County Superintendent Scott Kuykendall said in an emailed statement to The Bee on Friday that California should "pump the brakes" on vaccination requirements and allow parents and pediatricians to decide.

A teenager at the protest held a sign saying "'Pump the brakes,' Vaccines take time."

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Kuykendall said state officials should wait until there are "long-term studies and better answers to questions, including appropriate vaccine dosage for younger children and the effectiveness of natural immunity."

By contrast, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond and U.S. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona supported the vaccine mandate as an effort to keep schools safe and open for in-person instruction.

"We don't want to have the yo-yo effect that many districts had last year, and we can prevent that by getting vaccinated," Cardona said in a statement posted to Newsom's office.

Dr. Anthony Fauci applauded the step as well. "People need to realize that having a vaccine requirement for schools is not a new, novel thing that is very peculiar or specific to COVID-19. We've been doing this for decades," Fauci said.

Under Newsom's order, students who decline to be vaccinated for COVID-19 when eligible will need to enroll in independent study. Students may cite personal beliefs to gain an exemption.

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The requirement will take effect at the start of the school term that follows the full authorization of the vaccine for each age group, separated by grade spans K-6 and 7-12.

Between 200 and 300 people protested at SCOE on Wednesday. About 110,000 students attend Stanislaus County schools.

Instead of counterprotesting the demonstration in person, a group of parents sent the education office emails in support of vaccines. Spokeswoman Judy Boring confirmed the office received emails regarding the protest through its website and to the administrative assistant.

Superintendent Christine Facella said Riverbank Unified School District appeared to have an uptick in absences Wednesday compared to the previous couple days, though she didn't indicate it was connected with the protest.

Modesto City Schools spokeswoman Becky Fortuna said her district did not see a significant increase in absences Wednesday, nor have school officials received an outpouring of support for, or opposition to, vaccines. Ceres Unified School District spokeswoman Beth Jimenez said the same.

Children missing school to demonstrate waved American flags and held signs like "Kids lives matter" and "My body my choice."

Cars blared their horns to the shrieking crowd, which blocked the stairs to the education office, filled the other side of the street and spilled over onto the surrounding block corners.

A woman with three small children walked toward the crowd, repeating, "We are not in school today."

"This is a lot of people," one of the children remarked.

"Gotta go find my friends," the mom said, moving toward the crowd.

Another person commented, "This is where it starts. With enough people saying no."

Emily Isaacman is the education reporter for The Bee's community-funded Economic Mobility Lab, which features a team of reporters covering equity, economic development and education. The Lab's support comes from Stanislaus State University, E.&J. Gallo Winery, Porges Family Foundation, the James B. McClatchy Foundation and more than 250 community members.

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This story was originally published October 6, 2021 2:07 PM.

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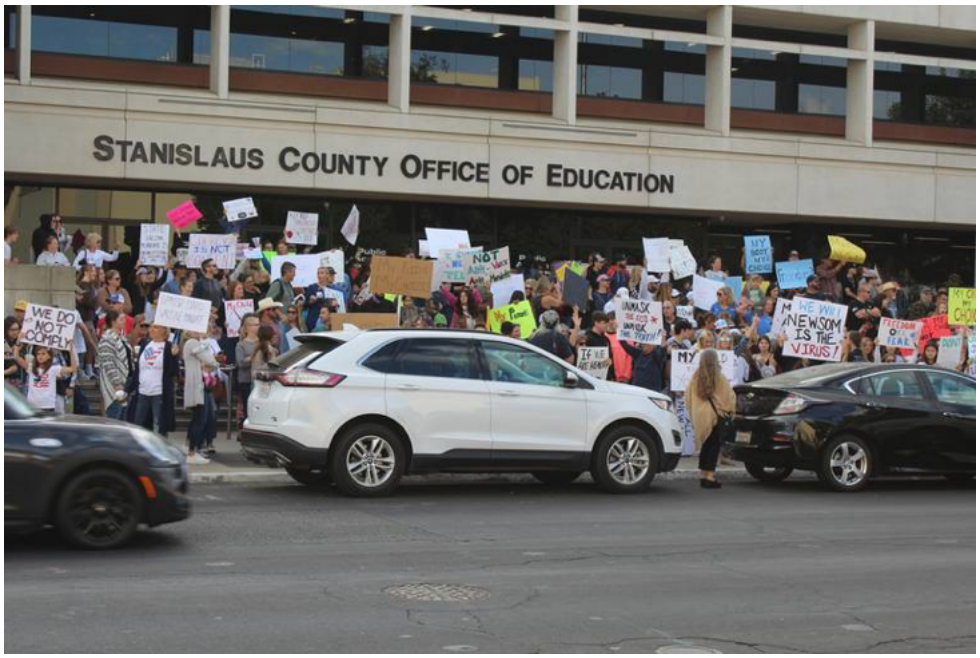

Hundreds of people gathered outside the Stanislaus County Office of Education Wednesday morning to protest Gov. Gavin Newsom's vaccine mandate for eligible students. EMILY ISAACMAN

EMILY ISAACMAN

Emily Isaacman covers education for the Modesto Bee's Economic Mobility Lab. She is from San Diego and graduated from Indiana University, where she majored in journalism and political science. Emily has interned with Chalkbeat Indiana, the Dow Jones News Fund and Reuters.

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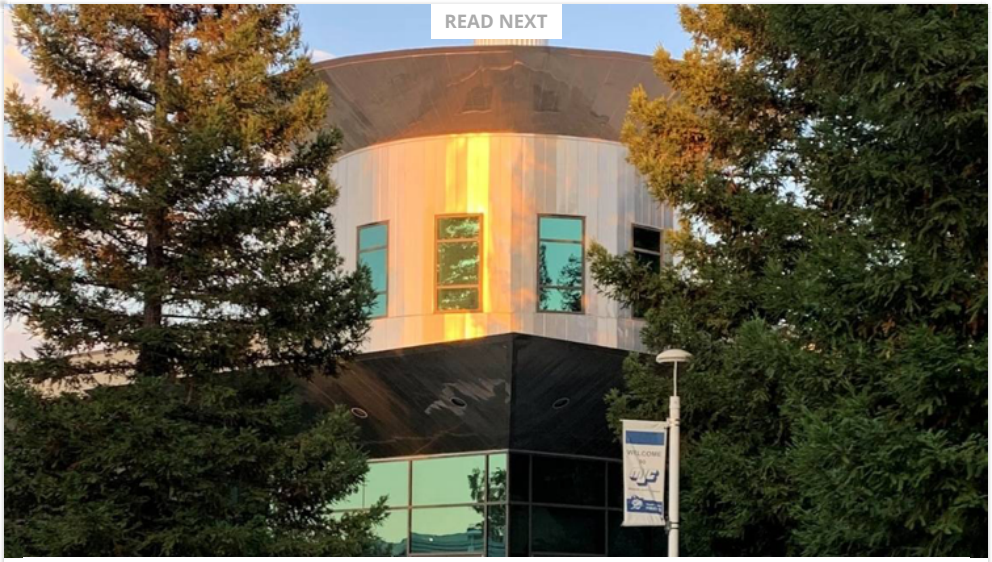

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BY EMILY ISAACMAN
UPDATED OCTOBER 14, 2021 6:03 AM

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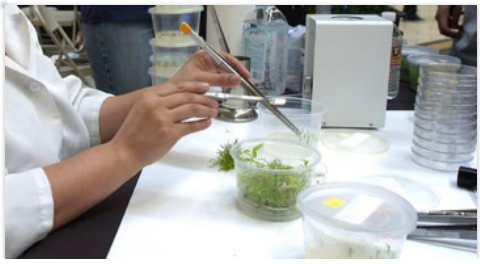

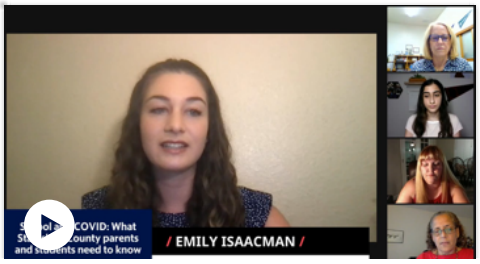

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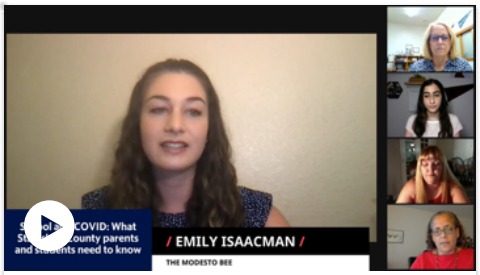

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